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GREAT HIGHWAY REDESIGN NORTH OF LINCOLN WAY

A CONCEPTUAL PLAN

SF

Prepared for
THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
by
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Landscape Architects & Urban Designers

DOCUMENTS DEPT.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the California Coastal Act of 1976, the San Francisco Department of City Planning has undertaken the development of a Local Coastal Program covering the San Francisco coastal zone. This report, which focuses on the Great Highway between Lincoln Way and the Cliff House, has been prepared for the Department of City Planning by Michael Painter & Associates in their role as consultants to the city.

The study area included the Great Highway from Lincoln Way north to the Cliff House, Sutro Heights Park and Block 1592 of the Ocean Beach Park Estates property which is being considered for inclusion in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. That portion of Golden Gate Park which falls within the Coastal Zone has only been considered with regard to circulation of automobiles, pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists.

At the present time the major feature of the study area is the Great Highway, which consists of three lanes of traffic in each direction separated by a series of large parking areas in the center. The road narrows to two lanes in each direction near the southern edge of Sutro Heights Park below the hill. The parking area between Fulton and Balboa, which was originally designed to accommodate the former Playland-at-the-Beach amusement park, has a capacity of 500 cars. The parking area between Fulton and Lincoln opposite Golden Gate Park has a capacity of 800 cars. Thus with the exception of a narrow band of Ice Plant bordering the esplanade walkway, the prime study area is entirely paved.

II. GOALS

As a first step in undertaking this redesign, the Consultant and the Department of City Planning isolated a number of features which needed to be accommodated in any new plan for the area. These included:

1. Need to provide adequate parking which is safely separated from highway traffic.
2. Need to improve recreational access between existing park areas, especially between Golden Gate Park and the beach and between Golden Gate Park and Sutro Heights Park.
3. Need to provide two lanes in each direction for traffic circulation.
4. Need to provide improved visitor services including one or more vandalproof restrooms.
5. Need to strengthen Golden Gate Park's western windbreak plantings and to improve the visual relationship between the park and the beach.
6. Desire to generally improve the appearance and maintainability of the area.

A number of major issues were also isolated and these were brought before the public and the representatives of those City Departments which were concerned at two hearings on September 12th and 20th. At the initial meeting three plans were presented which illustrated (1) a solution favoring parking (2) a solution favoring maximum visual separation between the road and the recreation areas and (3) a solution favoring open space. Based upon comments received at this meeting a fourth plan evolved from the open space solution which was presented and discussed at the second public meeting. A series of interdepartmental city staff meetings were then held to further refine the redesign plan. The factors which affected the priorities reflected in the final design plan are discussed in detail in Section IV. of this report.

III. THE REDESIGN PLAN

1. The Roadway

The proposed plan for the Great Highway north of Lincoln Way calls for a gently curving, four lane divided roadway. It would link the similarly designed roadway south of Lincoln Way and Point Lobos Avenue on the north - both of which also have two lanes of traffic in each direction. The northbound and southbound traffic would be separated by a median strip which would vary in width from 18 feet at its widest point to 2 feet at its narrowest. Left turn lanes would be provided for southbound traffic at Balboa, Fulton, Kennedy Drive, the entrance to the Beach Chalet parking lot and at Lincoln Way, where there would be two left turn lanes.

The roadway would vary between elevation 12 and 20, according to City Datum,¹ with the low point occurring below the land bridge. Wherever possible the northbound lane would be set 1.5 feet above the southbound lane to improve vistas to the ocean for motorists. All curves would be banked and stop signs and signals would be provided where warranted.

A number of different treatments would be possible for the median strip. At its narrowest point, the Consultants are recommending a New Jersey barrier - which is a shaped concrete form 32 inches high and 24 inches wide at the bottom tapering to 6 inches at the top. Where the median strip widens out, it could be planted with a low, salt-tolerant ground cover or attractively paved.

A modification is also proposed in the alignment of the western end of South Drive, which presently terminates at the Great Highway in a complicated intersection. South Drive would be modified to feed into Lincoln Way near La Playa. The existing pavement west of this point would be removed and the area regraded and planted to strengthen Golden Gate Park's western windbreak. This modification could have the effect of reducing commuter traffic through Golden Gate Park.

1.

Elevation 0.00 in San Francisco Datum is 8.6 feet above mean sea level. All elevations used in this report are City Datum.

2. Parking Areas

A total of 830 parking spaces would be provided under the redesign plan, of which 42 would be reserve. The parking spaces are distributed as follows:

Opposite Golden Gate Park		Opposite Future Ocean Beach Park Estates property	
West of Great Highway	310	West of Great Highway	215
East of Great Highway adjacent to Beach Chalet	<u>195</u> 505	East of Great Highway near Cabrillo	68
		East of Great Highway near Fulton (reserve)	<u>42</u> 325

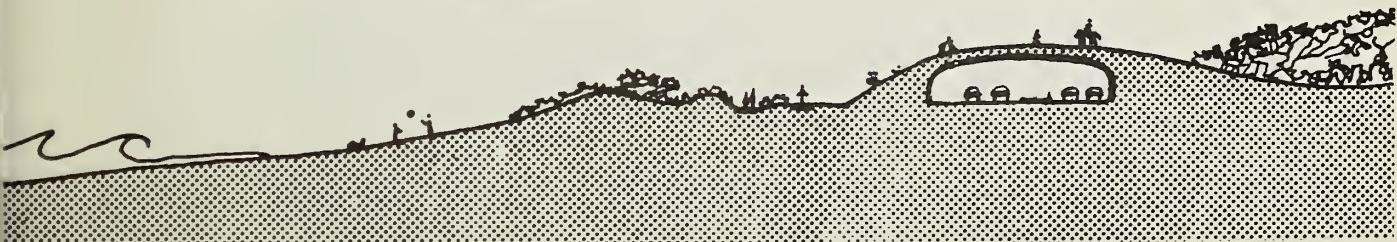
The reserve parking area would be surfaced in turf-block (concrete blocks with grass or ground cover planted in openings in the blocks and between them, designed to bear the weight of automobiles).

In general the grade of the parking lots would be approximately 1 foot to 3 feet below that of the Great Highway and mounded berms would be developed to screen views of parked cars.

3. Beach Access

The largest parking areas would be placed adjacent to the esplanade to enable visitors arriving at Ocean Beach by car to walk directly to the beach and esplanade from the parking space without crossing the roadway. Pedestrians approaching the beach from the parking areas located to the east of the Great Highway and from east-west streets terminating at it would be provided with distinctively paved or well-defined, on-grade crosswalks. Traffic signs or signals would be placed at these locations as warranted.

Pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists approaching the Great Highway from Golden Gate Park's path system would be able to cross the Great Highway at a broad land bridge, arching over the roadway near the intersection of Lincoln Way and the Great Highway. A molded concrete slide would be built into the western slope of the land bridge as a special feature in addition to the path on that side. Once across one would be able to continue south along the recreational trail system being developed to the east of the dunes and paralleling the Great Highway or to go down onto the beach by means of a ramp across the sewer outfall structure.

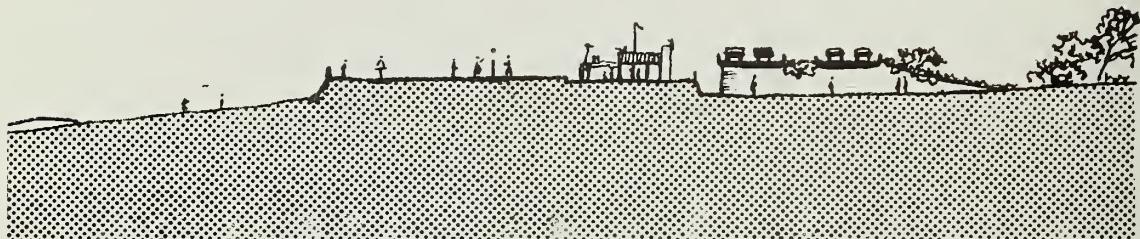


Land Bridge

Pedestrians interested in proceeding north from this location would walk along the esplanade and bicyclists would be provided with an asphalted path to the west of the Great Highway adjacent to the esplanade. At Fulton Street the bicyclist would have a choice of turning onto an alternative bicycle route which would proceed north via 47th Avenue, Sutro Heights Avenue and 48th Avenue to Point Lobos or continuing north along the esplanade bicycle path to the foot of the hill leading to the Cliff House, where he would be required to walk his bicycle up the hill on the sidewalk to Point Lobos Avenue. The option of riding up the hill in the roadway itself in the direction of traffic is also available to the bicyclist.

Equestrians and bicyclists approaching the area from the recreational trails south of Lincoln Way would also have the option of crossing into Golden Gate Park via the land bridge. At this point they would connect with the park's trail system where they could either proceed further east within the park or follow a loop along South Drive and Kennedy Drive which would lead generally north.

Pedestrians and bicyclists wishing to exit from Golden Gate Park at the northwest corner would be able to cross the Great Highway by means of a broad, new underpass. This curving structure would be 30 feet wide at its narrowest point, 10 feet high and provided with natural light from a 10 foot wide open space in the center. At the exit point at the western end of the underpass a path would lead off to the right, gradually sloping up to the grade of the esplanade and a short set of stairs would be located on the left.



Underpass

Although the height of the underpass will be adequate to accommodate a mounted equestrian, riders would not be encouraged to use this underpass. Equestrian trails in this portion of Golden Gate Park would lead to the existing underpass under Kennedy Drive near the Dutch windmill and from there north to Fulton Street. The path would then follow Fulton Street west to the crosswalk at the intersection of Fulton and the Great Highway where it would link up with a new trail leading to Sutro Heights Park. This has been done in order to discourage equestrians from riding on the heavily used northern end of Ocean Beach.

4. Green Belt

Under the redesign plan a green belt of new planting would be developed to the east of the Great Highway from Lincoln Way to the edge of Sutro Heights Park. Opposite Golden Gate Park the wind berm will be extended between 28 feet and 80 feet west of the present park boundary, expanding and reinforcing the existing 200 foot wide windbreak.

To the north of Fulton Street a new, soft-surfaced equestrian/pedestrian trail would be developed linking Golden Gate Park with Sutro Heights Park. This gently curving path would be located to the east of the Great Highway adjacent to the Ocean Beach Park Estates property line within a planted area varying in width from 30 feet to 100 feet. Berming would be used to provide a variety of topography and a feeling of separation from the adjacent roadway and parking lot. Ground cover, tree and shrub plantings throughout the corridor would be closely coordinated in order to assist in developing a visual connection between Golden Gate Park and Sutro Heights Park.

5. Plazas and Visitor Services

A major arrival space would be situated to the west of the Great Highway connecting with the proposed broad pedestrian underpass to Golden Gate Park and the Beach Chalet. The final program and design for this area would be developed in the schematic design phase of the Great Highway redesign, under the Wastewater Management Program.

The plan now depicts an 80 foot diameter children's play area provided with climbing structures and other equipment for active play. Seating for parents supervising their children and others simply enjoying the ocean views would be provided adjacent to the play area. The main open space, which extends to the existing walkway behind the sea wall is large enough to accommodate activities such as frisbee playing and volleyball. Picnic tables and seating could also be placed at the edge of the space.

A second special arrival area would expand upon the commercial plaza between the Great Highway and La Playa on Cabrillo, which is proposed as part of the Ocean Beach Park Estates project. This arrival area would repeat the same plaza paving, extending it to the esplanade west of the roadway. Seating areas would border this space and a restroom building would be located immediately north of it. Space for a mobile food service would also be provided for use on warm weekends to supplement the commercial service provided at the Ocean Beach Park Estates Cabrillo Plaza.

A second restroom structure would be located to the west of the Great Highway opposite Golden Gate Park adjacent to the parking area. Reserved parking would also be provided at this parking area for a second mobile food concessionaire.

Berms would be developed along the eastern edges of the beach parking areas and edged with 30" high walls which should reduce the amount of windblown litter or sand blowing across the highway.



Section thru Great Highway and Parking Area
Opposite Ocean Beach Park Estates

6. Plant Materials

The following plant materials are recommended by the Consultant as suitable for use within the study area.

Botanical Name

Common Name

a. Ground Covers

<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>	European Beach Grass
<i>Myoperum parvifolium</i>	Dwarf Myoperum
<i>Baccharis pilularis "Twin Peaks"</i>	Dwarf Coyote Bush
<i>Mesembryanthium chilense</i>	Sea Fig
<i>Convolvulus soldanella</i>	Beach Morning Glory

b. Large Shrubs and Low Trees

<i>Myoperum laetum</i>	Myoperum
<i>Leptospermum laevigatum</i>	Australian Tea-tree
<i>Acacia longifolia</i>	Sydney Golden Wattle
<i>Metrosideros tomentosa</i>	New Zealand Christmas Tree

c. Trees

<i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i>	Monterey Cypress
<i>Pinus torreyana</i>	Torrey Pine

7. Lighting

The present lighting of this area consists of fixtures bordering its east and west edges. The fixture is a standard "Cobra Head" shaped form housing mercury vapor lights on arching arms, which are mounted on precast concrete posts. This solution provides a high degree of glare and very little light to the parking lots in the center.

It is proposed that new lighting fixtures be installed bordering the edge of the gently curving road and that a non-glare, energy-efficient down light be used. Precast concrete posts are still the best choice for low maintenance. The fixtures could be mounted in rectangular boxes similar to those recently placed on the Golden Gate Bridge.

Lighting for the parking lots and plaza areas adjacent to the road would be provided by double-armed fixtures. The installation of lighting fixtures within the pedestrian underpass is not recommended as adequate daylight will be available from the entrances and the center opening. Its use at night is not envisioned.

IV. ISSUES

The redesign plan as recommended by the Consultant is necessarily the result of compromise in many areas. Through the public hearing process and later in interdepartmental city staff meetings, the Consultant gathered information and developed priorities which were incorporated in the design. The major subjects of discussion were as follows:

1. Parking

Whether the existing amount of parking should be provided within the corridor or whether Golden Gate Park should be extended toward the esplanade to improve its visual relationship to the beach; whether the existing amount of parking should be provided opposite the former Playland-at-the-Beach site now that the amusement park is closed or whether this area could be better utilized in developing a green belt including a recreational trail linking Golden Gate Park with Sutro Heights Park.

The issue of parking was a major subject of discussion at the public meetings and subsequent City staff meetings. There was agreement that there are relatively few days of the year when most of the existing parking spaces within the corridor are filled. There was, however, general consensus that the redesign plan need not attempt to provide for these peak days at the expense of restoring the Great Highway area to a more natural park beach like setting.

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) has conducted a user survey in its General Management Plan, Environmental Analysis, June 1979. Its quantification of transportation impacts (Table 15, page 130) indicates a parking deficit of 250 parking spaces for the entire Great Highway corridor from Sloat Boulevard to Balboa over those available on GGNRA property, under existing use. It also indicates a projected parking deficit of 722 parking spaces for proposed or potential use. The General Management Plan points out that in this corridor the deficit will be accommodated by available adjacent parking (in this case, on the Great Highway): "At Ocean Beach a large amount of adjacent parking is available, and it will more than compensate for the lack of parking space within the boundary". It also notes that adjacent communities will not be affected.

In order to determine the optimum number of parking spaces, the Consultant assembled published counts of the number of cars parked within the corridor and made four additional counts of parked cars on weekend days. The results are as follows:

PARKING COUNTS

	Number of cars parked at one time - Balboa to Fulton (369 existing spaces in center of road)		Number of cars parked at one time - Fulton to Lincoln (800 existing spaces in center of road)	
	<u>% Full</u>	<u>No. of Cars</u>	<u>% Full</u>	<u>No. of Cars</u>
Sunday afternoon 5/1/77 65° <u>West Side Transport</u> <u>EIR</u>		no count taken	18%	140
Thursday 4-6 p.m. <u>Ocean Beach Park Estates</u> <u>EIR</u>	20-27%	74-100	no count taken	
Cloudy weekend day 4/79 <u>Ocean Beach Park Estates</u> <u>EIR</u>	27-41%	100-150	no count taken	
Saturday 9/15/79 2 p.m. 70° <u>Michael Painter &</u> <u>Associates</u>	38-46%	140-170*	25%	200
Sunday 9/30/79 2 p.m. 75° <u>Michael Painter &</u> <u>Associates</u>	63%-72%	234-264*	75%	600
Sunday 10/21/79 2 p.m. 60° <u>Michael Painter &</u> <u>Associates</u>	55%	202	47%	377
Sunday 10/28/79 2:30 p.m. 60° and windy <u>Michael</u> <u>Painter & Associates</u>	27%	98	16%	127
AVERAGE	38-44%	141-164	36%	289

* Adjusted to exclude special parking for Treasures of Tutankhamun.

The area opposite the former Playland-at-the-Beach presently can accommodate up to 500 parking spaces but only 369 marked spaces are actually available for use at this time. The 325 spaces proposed represent 88% of the parking stalls actually in use and would have more than accommodated the number of cars present (264) on the peak day counted. This excess capacity could be used by the proposed new development on the former Playland site.

Opposite Golden Gate Park 800 cars can presently be accommodated. The redesign plan is proposing 505 parking spaces for this area, or 63% of the existing number of spaces. Overall the redesign plan proposes a total of 830 parking spaces for the entire corridor, which is 71% of the existing 1169 spaces available for use.

On a policy level, the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan for the City and County of San Francisco has long advocated a "transit first" policy encouraging citizens of San Francisco and the region to rely less on their automobiles and more on public transportation. The Municipal Railway has bolstered this policy by the addition and expansion of its bus routes, specifically geared to provide access to the beach for riders from every part of the City, and by facilitating transfer connections from regional transit. Since April 1979 the Municipal Railway has experienced a 20% increase in ridership, systemwide.

In addition, the Recreation and Open Space Element speaks specifically to the issue of recreational transportation under its regional and city-wide objectives as the key to accessibility of parks, for the convenience of people who do not own cars and to reduce the impact of the automobile on the natural landscape.

Also, the GGNRA has plans for a shuttle system to provide access for Bay Area residents to the GGNRA, as delineated in its Golden Gate Recreational Transportation Study (GGRTS). Specifically, they propose a shuttle from the Golden Gate Bridge (with regional connections) to the length of the Ocean Beach area.

Based on the foregoing, the Consultant concluded that approximately 800 parking spaces were more than sufficient to fulfill the future need within the study area. The redesign plan includes 830 parking spaces, which is approximately 100 more than the GGNRA study indicated was necessary for future needs for the whole Great Highway corridor. This would include 42 reserve parking spaces.

Anything beyond this amount of parking would violate long standing local, regional and federal policy encouraging an increased reliance on public transit. Certainly, no one would want to see a continuation of the vast expanse of concrete which is there now.

2. Plant Materials

Whether it would be possible to successfully introduce plant materials into this area and how to ensure adequate maintenance of them once introduced.

The second most-discussed issue was this one. The Consultant has recommended a palette of plant materials which are presently demonstrating their ability to survive ocean-front conditions at other similar locations along the Great Highway, opposite the Zoo and at Fort Funston and which appear in historic photos of the study area.

The Recreation and Park Department has indicated that it is in favor of an extension of Golden Gate Park's boundary at least 15-35' westward and that it recognizes and accepts responsibility for the maintenance of this windbreak extension, which would be designed in accordance with the Golden Gate Park Reforestation Plan.

The City Planning Commission has required the developer of Ocean Beach Park Estates and his successors to design, construct and maintain the landscaped recreational corridor which would link Golden Gate Park and Sutro Heights Park and which would front on his property. Governmental aid may be sought by the developer in connection with this responsibility. In addition, the City Planning Commission has also asked that the possibility of ceding this strip of land and the responsibility for maintenance of it to the GGNRA be considered.

There was a consensus that any plantings introduced to the west of the roadway should be low-maintenance as well as hardy. After the establishment period the amount of labor required to maintain them should not be significantly greater than that now required to maintain the road and parking lots. The redesign plan includes approximately 1.2 acres of plantings in this area, which is presently maintained as roadway by the Department of Public Works.

3. Windbreak

Whether the integrity of the Golden Gate Park windbreak and its improvement should take priority over the maintenance of the existing north-south path on the old transit right-of-way behind the Beach Chalet.

Because of the concern of the Recreation & Park Department staff about the sensitive nature of Golden Gate Park's western windbreak and the need to establish new trees within it, north-south pedestrian and bicycle circulation was directed along the esplanade and along a loop adjacent to South Drive and Kennedy Drive within Golden Gate Park which could accommodate equestrians, pedestrians and bicyclists. According to the Recreation & Park Department, success in expanding and replanting this windbreak could be in part dependent upon the ability to discourage circulation through it during the establishment period; and once established, the windbreak would be much more effective if not bisected by a path. This is an issue which will have to be resolved by the Recreation & Park Commission because the right-of-way is currently in use.

4. Commercial Amenities

Whether small scale, visitor-oriented commercial amenities should be provided within the study area.

The City Planning and Recreation & Park Departments and the staff of the Coastal Commission are in favor of the development of some type of take-out food service in this area, whether mobile or permanent. The redesign plan provides reserved parking for mobile food services within the two beach parking lots. In addition, the staffs of City Planning and Recreation & Park have proposed the inclusion of a facility for take-out food in the redesigned Beach Chalet.

This issue was the subject of considerable discussion during the earlier GGNRA hearings on the future of Ocean Beach. There has been strong opposition to any permanent structures on the west side of the highway and concern about the problem of wind-blown litter resulting from the concessions, notably from the GGNRA.

5. Richmond-Sunset Sewage Treatment Plant

What use should be made of the site of the Richmond-Sunset Sewage Treatment Plant after it is removed from Golden Gate Park?

This issue was discussed in some detail at the first public meeting. Possible uses suggested by the Consultant included a meadow and picnic area, or additional soccer fields or reserve/overflow parking for cars and horse trailers. The consensus was that this location was too remote to allow for proper policing of a parking area and that cars should not be encouraged to enter the park. A suggestion was also made that a portion of the site be utilized for a wood-waste recycling program with the wood chips being used for mulch for park plantings.

The redesign plan depicts the site of the Richmond-Sunset Sewage Treatment Plant as open space; the Consultant recommends that the precise use of this area be determined at a future date in accordance with the standard planning procedures for Golden Gate Park.

V. CONCLUSION

In undertaking the development of this conceptual plan, the Consultant has attempted to develop a design which would coordinate with proposed improvement projects for the area such as the Wastewater Management sewer construction and Ocean Beach Park Estates, in order to take advantage of any funds which might be available in connection with these projects. However, the plan does depict some features which are not entirely funded at this time. It was the Consultant's opinion and that of the City Planning Department that to restrict planning to immediately fundable items would result in a "low expectations" plan and make it more difficult, if not impossible, to obtain funding from other sources, some of which are now being investigated by City staff.

By the same token, the recent budget cuts which have affected all City Departments have made them reluctant to add to their areas of responsibility in terms of maintenance. There is no question but that leaving the entire corridor paved, as it now is, would result in lower maintenance costs. Such a decision would not, however, best serve the interests of the people of San Francisco and the thousands of visitors to our city for whom Ocean Beach will be their only experience of the California coastline.

